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Summary record of the 40th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 10 December 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
later: Ms. Incera (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 116: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 *(continued)* (A/52/7/Add.1-2 and 4, A/52/16/Add.1, A/51/950 and Corr.1 and Add.1-6, A/52/303 and Add.1, A/C.5/52/23 and Corr.1, A/C.5/52/19, A/C.5/52/20 and A/C.5/52/27).

1. **Mr. Tankoano** (Niger) supported the statement made at a previous meeting by the representative of Togo with respect to the United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament. With specific regard to the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, he said that the decision by the Secretary-General to send a two-man mission of consultants to Africa in August and September 1997, had been taken in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 51/46 E, and of a decision of the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity. The consultants had recommended, *inter alia* the appointment of a director of the Centre and the preparation of a five-year plan of work to be submitted to donors for contributions. The international community should make further efforts to ensure the provision of adequate resources for the continued functioning of the Centre. The matter should therefore be given thorough consideration.

2. **Mr. Elmontasser** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) supported the Secretary-General's reform proposals. Member States should pay their contributions in full, on time and without preconditions or threats. He objected to the proposed transfer of the Decolonization Unit to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. The posts in the Decolonization Unit should be approved in accordance with the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. His delegation was opposed to closing down the regional centres for peace and disarmament. It supported the creation of a post of Deputy Secretary-General; however such a post should not limit the authority of the Secretary-General or establish another layer of decision-making. The principle of equitable geographical distribution should be taken into account in that connection. His delegation enclosed the Advisory Committee's comments with respect to other posts.

3. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that as a member of the Special Committee on Decolonization Côte d'Ivoire strongly endorsed the statement made at the 37th meeting by the representative of Papua New Guinea concerning the Secretary-General's proposals for the Decolonization Unit. His delegation could not understand why the Advisory Committee had not commented on the proposals contained in document A/52/303/Add.1, regarding subprogramme 6, Decolonization, of programme 1, Political affairs, of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, and wondered whether it was the result of a political decision or due to a lack of technical information. Pending receipt of the Advisory Committee's comments, his delegation was opposed to the proposals. Finally, noting that the United States delegation had stated that, according to the Secretariat, the budget would decrease from $2,583,000,000 to $2,533,000,000 by the end of the year he wondered whether the Secretariat could indicate the source of that information and comment thereon.

4. *Ms. Incera (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

5. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) said that in principle, her delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee regarding the level of appropriation for the biennium 1998-1999. The United Nations should be provided with adequate resources to implement fully, efficiently and effectively all mandated programmes and activities. With respect to section 1B, she supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation concerning the Secretary-General's staffing proposals for the Strategic Planning Unit, stressing that appointments of staff to that unit should be subject to the principle of equitable geographical distribution. As far as section 22 (Human rights) was concerned, her delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation concerning the Secretary-General's proposal to reclassify the post of the Head of the New York Office from the D-1 to the D-2 level.

6. **Mr. de Rojas** (Venezuela) said that most of the proposals concerning section 1A were acceptable and that, with respect to section G (Legal affairs), the reclassification of one D-1 post to the level of Assistant Secretary-General was justified. Similarly, concerning section 22 (Human rights) it was appropriate to reclassify the head of the New York Office from the D-1 level to D-2.

7. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), expressed support, in principle, for the level of appropriations recommended by the Advisory Committee. The Organization must be given the resources it required to implement all its mandated programmes and activities in the coming biennium, especially in the area of international peace and regional cooperation.

8. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Thailand) supported the provision of an additional sum of $500,000 for the effective discharge of the responsibilities of the office of the President of the General Assembly.

9. **Mr. Sach** (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that most of the questions asked by the members of the Committee could best be answered in

informal consultations. The discussion on the Decolonization Unit could not be completed since the report of the Advisory Committee on the matter had not yet been submitted. The question of regional disarmament centres should also be considered when the Decolonization Unit was addressed.

10. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon), supported by Mr. SIAL (Pakistan), expressed the hope that the Secretariat would provide very specific answers during the informal consultations. Such answers should be complete, thorough and should go to the heart of the matter.

11. *The Chairman resumed the Chair.*

12. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic, referring to document A/52/303/Add.1, paragraph 2A.1, drew attention to a translation error in the Arabic text.

13. **Mr. Ahounou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that he was still waiting for a response to his question concerning the source of the information cited by the United States delegation, regarding the adjustment of the budget to $2,533,000,000.

14. **Ms. Shearouse** (United States of America) pointed out paragraph 6 of document A/52/6/Rev.1 (vol. I) that referred to a reduction of around $50 million based on recosting. Its statement had therefore been based on an estimate provided by the Secretary-General in his introduction to the budget.

15. **Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) said that the Advisory Committee usually engaged in recosting at the end of the session and certain parameters were considered, namely, the level of the budget estimated the year before, and the level of the reserve fund.

16. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that currency fluctuations and inflation should not be used as a basis for recosting the budget because they were unpredictable.

17. **Mr. Nour** (Egypt) expressed full support for the statement made by the representative of Cameroon with respect to the budget process. It was his delegation's understanding that recosting was a technical step that was taken at the very end of the budget process.

18. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, Controller) said that the Egyptian representative's understanding was correct. The exchange rate used in the preparation of the budget was the one approved at the time of the adoption of the revised appropriation for the preceding biennium, and the estimates were not recosted until the end of the year. Recosted estimates would be submitted to the Committee in the near future.

19. Replying to the question from Mexico, he said that the cost reduction for the Department for Disarmament and Arms Regulation resulted from the transfer of six posts earmarked for the servicing of the First Committee of the General Assembly, as explained in paragraph 1B.5 (ii) of document A/52/303. At the same time, three posts would be added, as explained in paragraph 2B.3 (c) of that document. The list of answers to questions raised during the debate would be circulated to delegations at an informal meeting.

Office accommodation at the Palais Wilson (A/52/7/Add.4 and A/C.5/52/19)

20. **The Chairman** drew attention to document A/C.5/52/19, containing the report of the Secretary-General on office accommodation at the "Palais Wilson" and to the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/52/7/Add.4), particularly paragraph 12 thereof.

21. **Ms. Rekkers** (Netherlands) said that while she recognized the need to provide adequate accommodation and conference space for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Advisory Committee had highlighted in paragraphs 7 to 11 of its report, a number of elements which required further explanation. She would appreciate clarification of whether the move was expected to remain budget-neutral after the biennium 1998-1999.

22. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that the Committee did not have a clear picture of the rationale for the proposed move or the content of the agreements between the Swiss Government and the United Nations. Moreover, it was unclear why only the Office of the High Commissioner was to be relocated. Further information was also needed on the amounts required for renovation, the type of construction to be carried out and the proposed funding source. He shared the views expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 7, 9 and 10 of its report.

23. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that the proposed move should not take place until the General Assembly had taken a specific decision in the matter, bearing in mind the concerns raised by the Advisory Committee. She shared the views expressed by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 7 of its report (A/52/7/Add.4). She also supported its recommendation that the possibility of accommodating other United Nations units at the Palais Wilson should be explored. It should be made clear whether the agreement between the United Nations and the Swiss authorities included the amount of $930,000 proposed for maintenance costs for the biennium 1998-1999. Such information must be provided as a matter of priority.

24. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium) said that he saw no reason why the Committee could not adopt the recommendation contained in paragraph 12 of the Advisory Committee's

report, which envisaged a final decision to be taken by the Assembly at some point in the future.

25. **Ms. Chen Yue** (China) said that she shared the views expressed by the representatives of Algeria and Cuba. At a previous meeting, her delegation had requested the Secretariat to clarify the rationale for the proposed move, and had not received a satisfactory reply. Having read document A/C.5/52/19, she now had additional questions.

26. First, she wished to know whether the Swiss Government had expressly designated the Palais Wilson as premises for the Office of the High Commissioner or whether it was being offered for the use of the United Nations in general. If the latter was the case, she wondered why only the Office was to be relocated there and not other units of the United Nations.

27. Secondly, paragraph 3 of the Secretary-General's report stated that the building would be granted rent-free, initially for the period from 1998 to 2000, with the intention of maintaining that arrangement indefinitely. She would appreciate clarification of whether "with the intention of" referred to the intention of the host country, the Office of the High Commissioner or the United Nations Office at Geneva. She also wished to know whether there was any legislative basis for that intention, such as an agreement with the Swiss Government. If the said intention had no legally binding power, information should be provided on what entity would pay the rent after 2000, what the amount would be and whether the departments concerned had made any careful analysis of the matter.

28. Thirdly, the funding arrangements to cover the cost of the relocation should be clarified. Paragraph 5, for example, stated that "account had been taken of the expected absorption by the Swiss authorities of the one-time structural costs, provided that such costs remain within SwF 4 million". It was unclear whether the Swiss authorities would absorb the one-time structural costs if they exceeded SwF 4 million. Further information was needed on the $930,000 for maintenance costs for the biennium 1998-1999.

29. Without an adequate rationale for the move, sufficient funding arrangements and a close analysis of the future impact of the move on the United Nations budget, any hasty action would have a negative impact on the Organization's already limited resources. She therefore supported the recommendation contained in paragraph 12 of the Advisory Committee's report.

30. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that while no expenditure was projected for the proposed move in 1998-1999, the cost estimates contained in paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's report showed recurrent costs of $2,640,000 which, as noted in the provision of the proposed programme budget under section 27F, Administration, Geneva. He wished to know whether that amount had been proposed and what would happen if the General Assembly did not approve the move. He would also appreciate information on the status of negotiations with the Swiss authorities.

31. **Mr. Odaga-Jalamayo** (Uganda) said that he shared the concerns expressed by previous speakers and would find it difficult to endorse the Advisory Committee's recommendation, since more information was needed on a number of issues. He drew attention, in particular, to the Advisory Committee's observation in paragraph 10 of its report that there were many elements of the recurrent costs that needed further explanation.

32. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria), supported by **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) and **Ms. Chen Yue** (China), said that the Committee should not take note of the report until all the necessary information was available.

33. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium) noted that the Advisory Committee had also raised questions in its report. If the Committee did not take note of the Secretary-General's report, the negotiations with the Swiss authorities would come to a halt. A decision would have to be taken, before the end of the present session.

34. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that no decision could be taken on the issue at the current meeting.

35. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should defer its consideration of the matter to a later meeting.

36. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 115: Programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 *(continued)*

Extension of the premises of the International Court of Justice

Draft Supplementary Agreement between the United Nations and the Carnegie Foundation concerning the use of the Peace Palace at The Hague (A/52/7/Add.5 and A/C.5/52/16)

37. **The Chairman** drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/52/16), and to the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/52/7/Add.5).

38. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that the Secretary-General's report referred repeatedly to total rental expenses before recosting, as in paragraph 9. He would be

grateful for an explanation of the meaning of "recosting". With regard to the dining facilities in the enlarged premises, he wished to know what arrangements had been made for food service operations, and whether the increased cost had been reflected in the budget.

39. **Mr. Sach** (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the figures which appeared in document A/C.5/52/16 as amounts for 1996-1997 before recosting reflected the exchange rates that had been used to prepare the current budget proposals and the inflation position before application of the index that was the subject of the draft Supplementary Agreement. The total of $253,300 and the related provisions of $2,178,500 contained in paragraph 9 of the document related to the basis on which proposals had been made under section 5 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

40. The dining facilities were not operated by the United Nations, hence transactions involving payment for food and other expenses were not part of the Organization's accounts.

41. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that at a previous meeting, the Secretariat had stated that the rental amounts were subject to an index that had been negotiated as part of the rental agreement, but that they had not been recosted. In his view, that could result in duplication and an overestimate of the amounts required to pay for the premises; he requested clarification from the Secretariat.

42. As the dining facilities apparently were operated by a private catering company, he wished to know whether that company reimbursed the United Nations for its rental and utility costs, inasmuch as the company gained revenue, and possibly income, from its use of the facilities.

43. **Mr. Sach** (Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the amount of 1,843,582 Netherlands florins which appeared in article II of the draft Supplementary Agreement (A/C.5/52/16, annex) was the base rent at 1997 rates. It would be adjusted, in accordance with the Agreement, at a certain index rate; on that basis, the projection for the 1998-1999 budget would be made, taking into account the exchange rate fluctuations applicable in the recosting process. As to the possibility of duplication, while more than one recosting operation was involved, depending on the time at which it was done and the then current parameters, there would be no double counting of inflation; it was simply a matter of applying the appropriate index in lieu of an earlier, hypothetical index. The Secretariat had not pursued the question of charging rent on the dining room, inasmuch as the premises were rented to begin with.

44. **The Chairman** suggested that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly the following draft decision:

> "The General Assembly,
>
> "1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the draft Supplementary Agreement between the United Nations and the Carnegie Foundation concerning the use of the Peace Palace at The Hague and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions contained in its report (A/52/7/Add.5);
>
> "2. Approves the draft Supplementary Agreement between the United Nations and the Carnegie Foundation concerning the use of the Peace Palace at The Hague."

45. *It was so decided.*

46. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of the question.

Agenda Item 153: Human resource management *(continued)* (A/52/580 and Corr.1)

47. **Mr. Küntzle** (Germany) noted with satisfaction that a substantial share of individuals appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution had been recruited through national competitive examinations. His delegation joined Japan in requesting clarification regarding the five staff members retained against P-2 posts outside the context of those examinations (A/52/580, para. 37).

48. A number of the trends revealed in Part Two of the report, such as the ageing of the Organization and the increasing numbers of younger staff resigning from the Organization after only a few years of service, were of concern to his delegation. The "diamond-shaped" configuration of staff by grade, which limited career development, required urgent attention.

49. Finally, his delegation had no objection to allowing more time for the Assistant Secretary-General to provide the relevant reports under General Assembly resolution 51/226.

50. **Mr. Cacciaguerra Ranghieri** (Italy) noting that Italy was the most under-represented among the 10 major contributors to the Organization and that its representation in the upper echelons of the Secretariat was also unsatisfactory, welcomed the decision to hold a national competitive examination in Italy in February 1998. He asked what measures were envisaged to accommodate the 22 successful candidates from the 1993 national competitive

examination who currently remained on the roster awaiting recruitment.

51. Finally, his delegation reiterated the concern of the European Union at the reduction in the number of P-2 and P-3 posts. If that trend continued, the efficiency and dynamism of the Organization would be seriously affected.

52. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia), noting that Indonesia had only six staff members at the Professional level said that his delegation strongly believed that the Secretary-General should conducted targeted searches for executive and managerial candidates from under-represented Member States, and that the desirable range should be set in relation to contributions to the regular budget and population size. It supported the national competitive examination process and efforts to increase the number of women in decision-making positions.

53. **Mr. Bong Hyun Kim** (Republic of Korea) recalling that, in General Assembly resolution 51/226 B, paragraph 24, the Secretary General had been urged to take measures to place candidates who had been successful in national competitive examinations within one year, wondered why only 26 such candidates had been placed. He was also concerned to see that 70 per cent of resignations were of younger staff members, and would like to know the reasons for that phenomenon.

54. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal) said that her delegation shared the concern at the small number of entry-level posts available. The proposed reductions in the number of posts at lower levels would certainly make the situation even more difficult.

55. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria), supported by **Mr. Yussuf** (United Republic of Tanzania), **Mr. Saha** (India) and **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), said that greater efforts must be made to remedy the situation regarding under-representation and non-representation of certain Member States and to address the ageing of the Secretariat. National competitive examinations had yet to be held in many countries, and greater efforts were also needed in that area.

56. His delegation took note of A/C.5/52/CRP.2 regarding the implementation and interpretation of General Assembly resolution 51/226, and suggested that consultations should be held on that issue as soon as the Committee resumed its work in the new year.

57. **Ms. Montano** (Bolivia), noting that the first national competitive examination had been held in Bolivia in 1997, asked how long the successful candidates could expect to wait before being recruited.

58. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that she would endeavour to answer questions raised by delegations. In reply to the delegation of Japan regarding a medium and long-term human resources plan, the Secretariat currently had the capacity to forecast and analyse trends for a five-year period. As the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) came on line in all duty stations and as staff developed expertise, it would be possible to project farther into the future. She regretted the delay in submitting the report, but explained that its scope had been expanded into populations of staff not scrutinized before, which had required some data cleansing and re-casting. Originally, two documents had been requested, but for editorial reasons, her office had been asked to issue them as one document. An immediate corrigendum of paragraph 94 and table F would be issued.

59. Regarding unrepresented and under-represented Member States, OHRM was working with those States and was pursuing the national competitive examination process. In addition, it had made executive searches for candidates from those States for the upper levels of the Professional category. Of the five persons placed against P-2 and P-3 posts outside the national competitive examination process, two had been retained because the posts required scientific or technical skills which it had not been possible to find through the examination process. The three remaining individuals had received extensions of short-term or fixed-term appointments on condition that they sat the national competitive examinations. One resigned before sitting the examination, one was unsuccessful and one had been informed that there would be no further extensions beyond 31 December 1997. She would provide a breakdown on as soon as possible of the number of appointments made through competitive examinations. Of the 26 successful candidates recruited during the reporting period, six had been placed within one year of the examination, four within two years, nine within three years, five within four years and two within five years. Her Office shared the concern regarding resignations of younger staff which could be attributed, in part to a compensation package which was often not competitive with the private sector and, in part to frustration about prospects for career advancement. In response it had begun an induction course for new staff members where issues critical to career development could be discussed. The human resources task force would address both the issue of attrition and of the "diamond-shaped" configuration of the staff.

60. With regard to table 4 of annex I, the number of posts subject to geographical distribution remained unchanged. In reply to the representative of Bolivia, the time lapse

between sitting the national competitive examination and recruitment of successful candidates depended essentially on the availability of posts in a given field.

61. **The Chairman** drew attention to a letter from the President of the United Nations Staff Union addressed to himself (the Chairman) informing him that four staff members in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had been told that their contracts would be terminated because their posts were being abolished, in violation of the commitments given by the Secretary-General that no staff members would lose their jobs as a result of reform. That action also was not in conformity with the guidelines established by OHRM.

62. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that her Office was discussing the matter with the department concerned and would ensure that the guidelines for redeployment were followed. However, she would like to hear the views of the manager involved before making any further comment.

63. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) asked what specific measures were being taken to ensure the orderly redeployment of permanent staff whose posts were to be abolished. She would also like to know whether provision had been made in the Secretary-General's report (A/52/303) for the appropriation of $15 million for the establishment of a one-time training and redeployment programme, as referred to in action 19 in document A/51/950. She wondered when the Assistant Secretary-General would be able to provide answers to those questions, as well as clarifications regarding the letter from the President of the Staff Union.

64. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) recalled that, at an earlier meeting, he had asked when the report on the use of consultants and associated contractual procedures in the United Nations, requested by the General Assembly in resolution 51/221, would be available.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.